

EXHIBITION ESSAY

what is gathered

Paul Burkhardt

Perhaps you're mistaken. You ask yourself if you're even in the right place, for nothing is gathered here at all. It's an empty gallery.

But before you back up, as you turn, you notice a pillar of stunted growth. Then your attention follows other pillars, in gradual stages of maturity, between those that do reach and support the ceiling. In this seemingly only gessoed space, there is something here.

When Rena Leinberger drafted a proposal for her installation, the detail she remembered from the gallery was a mere hinge, a peculiar, painted-over hinge. She has a finite regard for "the strange aesthetics of the almost accidental placement of interior fixtures having a sense of comedy and beauty," aesthetics that are commonly overlooked. "Attentiveness and awareness of everyday surroundings is rare," she says. In a gallery, with even the muted pace of soft stepping, they are totally ignored. And by Leinberger's sensitive gauge of space, they are neglected.

The petite dwarf pillar, however, is difficult not to notice. That the added pillars are flawlessly reproduced make it hard to identify an impostor. Their growth is evident by the capitals they lift. Without their smooth, exact and intact capitals, they would evoke associations of architectural ruin: Doric columns, say, with their connotations of cultural eternity toppled in stone sections so easily represent abandoned, buried civilizations. But the space the artist uses is growing, not decaying or disappearing.

As your attention, now discerning a camouflage of white, continues to scan the room, other utilitarian details emerge. These walls—not paid attention to for so long, crowds looking past them for years, sufferers of indirect light and always the focus of only the rim of the spotlight—vie for attention. Outlets and grates sprout. The switches in the switch plates never retreat. The corkscrew-handle-shaped knobs collect in a virus-like pattern on a door. They spread before your eyes, as in reaction to this new attention paid to the space, like bacteria under a tepid gaze.

Part of the space reacts allergically, while another component takes the opportunity to multiply. Exhibiting the microscopic range of Leinberger's perception, cover plates arrange in a gene pattern. Far from the conforming clusters, a rogue genome—a light switch and an electrical outlet—couple together. Other absurd evocations of evolution include redundant hinges that have aligned themselves with working ones. A lone hinge is mounted to a seam in the wall, summoning a door. In the most promising example of survival, a light switch, in an attempt to attach itself to something greater, has mysteriously made its way onto a pillar.

The order of the work "starts funny, but then undercurrents of emotion increase." As the spore-like light switches learn to jump onto pillars, we viewers reach the end of the room. At the turnaround point, we move back toward the exit. This is detected. HVAC ducts, floating and sharp-edged, are menacingly placed in a last effort to hold the viewer. Set at trippable and

forehead-wacking height, their desperate efforts are thwarted by diffuse broad lighting, unusual for these details so often relegated to dark corners.

The divided ductwork recalls a previous site-specific installation of Leinberger's. In *Rift*, Leinberger based an indiscriminate line that cut through a graceful Shaker table and two chairs on a preexisting 3/4-inch drop in the floor plane. The irreversible, unsettling cleave radiates like seismic aftershocks from the floor's imperfection. Those who would have unconsciously stepped over the uneven detail in the past are now forced to acknowledge it. Again the space seems alive.

In *what is gathered*, the room's transformation isn't as permanent. The partially emerged elements look just as likely to disappear into the white plaster quicksand, the ducts to retract into an artery of a behind-the-scenes HVAC system and the pillars to sink, perhaps leaving as the only evidence some dust to be swept.

But as we viewers exit, our perception of the gallery is heightened and everything in the gallery is questioned. What is original, what emerges and what is yet to come remains unknown. One notices the imperfections of even the floor: where it's been cut, discolored and replaced. The ceiling is especially suspect, for which of the odd bolts or beams has Leinberger installed?

When a building is knocked down, the wrecking ball crumples the layers and guts of the edifice. This is usually the only time the insides of a building are examined. In the way she regards the unnoticed or disregarded, Leinberger shows similarities to Gordon Matta-Clark. Surely she is gentler in how she chooses to show the importance of the structure, destroying nothing to make her point. In a space "where one is already there to observe and experience," Leinberger gives us a glimpse of the life within the space. You'll never walk into an empty room again.